

SUITLAND PARKWAY
Suitland Vicinity
Prince Georges County
Maryland

HAER NO. MD-100

HAER
MD,
17-SUIT.V,
1-

~~PHOTOGRAPHS~~

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING REPORT

SUITLAND PARKWAY

HAER No. MD-100

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MD
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Location: Suitland vicinity
Prince George's County
Maryland
UTM: 18.334150.4300050 4299900
18.337250.4299400
USGS QUAD Anacostia, DC-MD

Present Owner: Department of Interior, National Park Service,
National Capital Parks-East

Present Use: Commuter and local traffic link from South Capital Street in
Washington, D.C. to Maryland Route 4 and Andrews Air Force
Base in Maryland.

Significance: Suitland Parkway came into existence during World War II to
improve transportation for defense industry employees. Despite
increased usage, it still remains essentially incomplete some 45
years after it officially opened.

Suitland Parkway is one of the parkways that make up the network
of entryways into the capital. It has hosted both triumphal and
mournful processions.

It consists of 9.18 miles of roadway (2.8 miles in the District of
Columbia and 6.38 miles in Maryland) through a park corridor
comprised of 587.79 acres managed by the National Park Service
and the balance by the District of Columbia. The roadway extends
from the Anacostia River in the District to Maryland Route 4.

DESCRIPTION

Suitland parkway, now part of National Capitol Parks-East, extends 9.18 miles from the end of the South Capitol Street bridge in the District of Columbia to Route 4 in Maryland. Authorized by President Roosevelt as a national defense road during World War II, this new highway would allow direct access from Bolling Field in Washington, D.C. to Camp Springs Army Air Base in Maryland. Officially opened on December 9, 1944 the parkway design and construction combined the efforts of the Public Roads Administration, District of Columbia Engineer, National Park Service, National Capitol Park and Planning Commission, and the Maryland National Capitol and Park Planning Commission.¹ Bolling Field and Camp Springs Army Air Base were renamed Bolling Air Force Base and Andrews Air Force Base respectively in 1945.

Leading up to the War, land adjacent to the proposed Parkway had been used in a variety of ways. Development rapidly increased shortly after the War had begun. The establishment of a new federal office center, several military housing complexes, and threatening activity overseas all reinforced the need for upgrading the local roads and providing easy access to Camp Springs Air Base.²

Continued residential and commercial development along the Suitland Parkway Corridor have increased traffic use on the Parkway consistently since the end of the war. Hindered by several at-grade road crossings, traffic along the completed lanes is continually interrupted. To this day the Parkway remains incomplete with the majority being two lane road.

¹ National Park Service, "Washington D.C. Area Parkways: Historic Resource Study" by Jere L. Krakow, (1990).

² Ibid.

HISTORY OF THE PARKWAY

In 1937 the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCP&PC) made the decision to locate a parkway in the South-eastern section of the city which would connect Bolling Field in the District and Camp Springs Field in Maryland. The Commission decided that the proposed Suitland Parkway would "be a dual highway with separate east and west bound two-lane traffic arteries."³ Due to the lack of funding and World War II, plans were not developed for six years.⁴

In early 1942, designer T.C. Jeffers of the Maryland NCP&PC submitted a preliminary plan for the Parkway to the NCP&PC. As formerly discussed, the proposal called for the connection of the Suitland Government offices and the South Capitol Street bridge. In May 1942 the Planning Commission requested funding from the Bureau of Budget for land acquisition.⁵

With the approval of Camp Springs for a new airport, a strategy was devised to include the road right-of-way in the purchase of land for the new airport. Shortly after the idea was developed, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote the secretary of war:

"In connection with the installation of an army air base camp at Camp Springs Meadows, you are directed to acquire the necessary land for the proposed installation at Camp Springs including the right of way for a suitable access road from the Camp Springs site via the contemplated Suitland Parkway route to Bolling Field or an alternate route. This road upon completion of the South Capitol Street Bridge will afford quick access to the city of Washington, not only for, the Camp Springs airfield but also from the Federal Buildings and the Suitland area."⁶

After much deliberation and discussion with several Federal, State and District officials the authorization was given to the Public Road Administration as the principle designer. They would work in close coordination with the National Park Service, District of Columbia,

³ National Park Service, "Washington D.C. Area Parkways: Historic Resource Study", by Jere L. Krakow. (1990).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Roosevelt to the Secretary of war, August 25, 1942, National Archives, Record Group 328, Box 545/100.

NCP&PC, Commission of Fine Arts and relevant Maryland authorities. The National Park Service and the National Capitol Parks and Planning Commission collaborated on the design of five bridges which were reviewed by the Commission of Fine Arts.⁷

Public Road Administration started construction on September 27, 1943. Shortly after the initial presidential directive in August, 1942, the NCP&PC developed a conceptual layout plan for a multi-lane divided road. The Public Road Administration became involved and created a series of drawings to show land acquisition requirements. In September, topographic surveys were prepared to show the divided roadway that would connect South Capitol Street Bridge and Camp Springs Field. The NCP&PC used the surveys to define the required right-of way for the Parkway. The Real Estate Branch of the War Department then did the land acquisition.⁸

The official request for work came from the Secretary of War directed to the Federal Works Agency. Construction was then delegated to the Public Roads Administration. All design and construction was reviewed by the NCP&PC, Fine Arts Commission and the National Park Service. When the Parkway was deemed no longer necessary for defense it was legislated to the National Park Service. The entire length of the parkway opened in December of 1944. The Planners involved in the project originally intended for the parkway to extend to the Chesapeake Bay. Due to the excessive cost, the extension was not included.⁹

Legislation, introduced in 1949, called for the permanent transfer of the parkway and "all (its) lands and easements heretofore or hereafter acquired by the United States." H.R. 2214 passed Congress on August 17, 1949.¹⁰ The law stated that the Suitland Parkway be "developed, operated, and administered as a limited access road primarily to provide a dignified, protected, safe, and suitable approach for passenger-vehicle traffic to the National Capital and for an uninterrupted means of access between several Federal establishments adjacent thereto and the seat of government in the District of Columbia."¹¹

⁷ National Park Service "Washington D.C. Area Parkways: Historic Resource Study" by Jere L. Krakow, (1990).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ U.S. statues at Large, LXIII, p.613.

PRESENT CONDITION

"The Suitland Parkway crosses the Atlantic Coastal Plain from the Anacostia River easterly to its terminus at Marlboro Pike. A variety of hardwoods historically covered this road corridor, principally oak and sweet gum. The median is a grassy strip mown to present a park-like character for users, and most of the structures are stone clad in the traditions of the parkway design stemming from the Westchester County New York predecessor. The uncompleted (B road) is grass-covered except for a barren lane made so by users on foot, bike, horseback, or vehicle."¹²

Landscaping was of great importance from the beginning. In the tradition of early 19th century Parkway design, the larger trees were left standing where ever possible, grass was planted in graded areas and surrounding buildings were screened. Guardrails were constructed with wood post and rails. As work has continued over the years, additional trees have been planted including flowering specimens.¹³

During initial construction, 38 culverts were built along the length of the parkway. these included small tubes, multiple tubes, and box culverts. The majority have stone-faced headwalls. There are 39 inlets, 0.14 miles of stone lined ditches, and 2.89 miles of curbing.¹⁴

¹² National Park Service "Washington D.C. Area Parkways: Historic Resource Study" by Jere L. Krakow (1990).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid

Bibliography

National Park Service. " Washington D.C. Area Parkways: Historic Resource Study," by
Jere L. Krakow. 1990.

Roosevelt to the Secretary of War, August 25, 1942. National Archives, Record Group 328,
Box 545/100.

U.S. Statues at Large, LXIII, P.613.